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A study of *Semiotics* in the Indian ancient spiritual literature: Exploring a pathway to decipher semiotics in the poetic works of Mellacheruvu Subrahmanya Sastri

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Abstract
The present study offers a first ever pathway to the understanding of the Indian '*semiotics'* embedded in Vedic literature through the Sanskrit and Telugu poetic works of Mellacheruvu Subrahmanya Sastri— '*Sri Nirajana*' and *Sri Krishna Raasa Lila—Yogatrayee Hela*. Indian Vedic literature is a repertoire of *semiotics*. *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabhrarata*, *The Bhagavatam*, etc are based on Vedic tenets and doctrines. While Valmiki had written *The Ramayana*, Vyasa has contributed the latter two—*The Mahabharata*, and *The Bhagavata*. One thing common in all these texts, descending down from Vedic literature, is extensive use of *semiotics.* The imagery, the ideas, the values, the traditions, the observances, the objects, the rituals, etc are all expressed through the signs, symbols and codes, which combinedly called in the West as '*semiotics*', a branch that emerged in the post half of the last century. Though there were a few studies from the Western scholars (Gerow, 1984; Piatigorsky & Zilberman, 2009) to study the Indian *semiotics* in ancient Indian texts, they could hardly make any big way in decoding them due to lack of an in-depth Sanskrit knowledge. The study is explorative coupled with hermeneutics, and reveals simple pathways to draw meanings for the '*Semiotics'* in the poetic works under study.

Keyword: Semiotics (semiology), Signs, symbols and Codes, Sri Nirajana, Sri Krishna Raasa Lila-Yogatrayee Hela, Ekakshara Nighantuvu, Shodasi, Panchadasi, etc.

Introduction
As part of our ongoing efforts to internationalize the immense potential embedded in the ancient Indian spiritual literature and its scholars (Murthy, 2019), the present study intends to explore simple pathways to understand and explain the '*semiotics'* in ancient Indian literature. Murthy (Murthy, 2016; Murthy, 2020) has earlier published a series of articles on this subject showing how '*semiotics*', especially metaphor, has been extensively used both in Indian literature (novel) and its cinema (Hindi and Telugu).

It is well known among language scholars that the ancient spiritual literature is the mother of today's modern literature, be it Hindi (in North) or Telugu (in South) or any other language in the East and West of India. It all happened due to systematic as well as random transformation of societies across the country due to various factors (such as wars, migrations, natural upheavals, invasions, etc.). Language transformation is an inevitable process, says eminent Telugu Dravidian linguist Bhadriraju Krishna Murti [1] (1999), and it happens, according to him, in several pathways (Murti, 1979). But the grammatical processes, descended down from ancient literatures, however remained same over millennia, language transformations notwithstanding. Almost every linguist in India admits that Indian language transformations have always been centered round Sanskrit in the beginning. There is no language, be it Aryan or Dravidian, in India that has not intercoursed with Sanskrit at one point of time or the other. Historians, Indologists, linguists, and language scholars could not lay down one acceptable common theory to explain how both Dravidian and Aryan languages came into intercourse with Sanskrit and how Sanskrit grammar as enunciated by Panini (there is no consensus on his

date of existence before Christ era) through his work *Ashtaadhyayi* has indelibly influenced the grammar of all other languages in India (Murti, 2003).

It is also clear that the ancient spiritual literature has contributed to the enrichment of modern language in a number of ways if one takes a dispassionate look at the literature produced from the ancient poet-scholars such as Valmiki, Vyasa, Sri Harsha, Kalidasa (4^{th}-5^{th} century), Gunadhya (6th century) of Sanskrit to Bammera Potana (1450-1510), Sri Sri, Kundurti Anjaneyulu (1922-1982) of Telugu. *Alankaras* (Figures of Speech), *Chandhas* (Prosody), *Sandhis* (vowel+vowel combination/vowel+consonant leading to sound transformation), *Samasaas* (interpreting a word), S*leshas* (a word derives two meanings at a time — one as a root word (*dhatu*) and another as noun/adjective), *Nudikarams* (Idioms), etc have stemmed from the ancient spiritual literature such as *Vedas*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata.* All these are present in what we deem as most modern languages of today too.

Telugu modern poetry still largely depends on most of the above cited language facets that descended from the ancient Sanskrit poetry even today. But, unfortunately, the rich repertoire of '*semiotics*', despite in their extensive use in Sanskrit and Telugu languages, could not be formed in to a subject of serious study either in the Sanskrit or in Telugu. The present study is an effort to plug this gap of knowledge by examining a couple of Sanskrit texts produced by Mellacheruvu Subrahmanya Sastri (1948-till date), a Sanskrit exponent, (an eminent poet in both Telugu and Sanskrit, an eminent translator of medieval literature besides being a commentator), and to expound the simple pathways Sastri has laid down for studying *semiotics* in the ancient Sanskrit texts.

'*Semiotics*' in Indian literature has not been studied critically in India. '*Semiotics*' means study of 'signs, symbols and codes. In fact, the Vedic literature is a repertoire of '*Semiotics*'. Almost every Vedic enchantment offers a lot of spiritual messages through the encoding of 'signs, symbols and codes' which we together call today as *'semiotics'*. Similarly, *Upanishads*, (the Sanskrit texts that are referred to as '*Vedanta*', means an essence of *Vedas* found at the end of *Vedas)*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavatam*, *Mimamsa* (comprising *purva mimamsa* and *uttara mimamsa*), *Nyaya*, *Vaishesika*, are full of '*semiotics*. Without an in-depth knowledge of Sanskrit or without the guidance of highly learnt Sanskrit scholars, it is not possible to understand and decode the 'semiotics' embedded in the ancient literature. Sometimes improper understanding/decoding of this '*semiotics*' may lead to a totally incorrect or wrong meaning/decoding as well.

'*Semiotics*' in Sanskrit /Telugu literatures may be referred to as *'Sangnya Sastra'*. Vedic literature offered not only spiritual pathways but also has laid down social norms, traditions and observances to lead a healthy and hygienic social life. It stipulated social systems that embrace all sections of society. These systems offered—methods of worships at homes and temples, at deaths and births, *Namaskarams* (obeisances), consecrations, *Agama Sastras* (temple traditions), *pradakshinas* (oblations), *mandaps*, lighting lamps, etc. All these methods followed in social life are replete with '*Semiotics*'. Flowers, fruits, breaking coconuts, lighting camphor, ringing bells at temple or at home, blowing conch, erecting banana or coconut tree's stems at sacred functions like *utsavas*, *vivaahaas* (marriages) or any holy functions. *Darbhas* (Sea or river bed born sharp edeged grass), *homams* (*agnihotrams*), etc are part of these '*Semiotics*'. Despite extensive application of signs, symbols, codes in Indian societal activities and religious functions, no cultural studies scholar or linguist from India has seriously put them into a 'cultural model' emerging from Indian ancient literature. In fact, semiotics in Indian literature, culture and traditions are always associated with phenomenology since ancient times.

The decoding of these signs, symbols and codes occurring in ancient Indian literature may be some times simple and at times very complicated. It depends on the depth of Sanskrit scholarship one possessed. The spiritual texts such as epics (*Ramayana*, *Mahabharata*) that emerged after *Vedas* have also been embedded with 'semiotics' extensively. As there is no research on these '*semiotics*' in India, people looked at these '*semiotics*' as mere 'ritualistic' without much relevance or consequence to Indian social science research. But the West has not viewed the study of 'signs, symbols, and codes' of their cultures or other cultures across the globe as 'ritualistic'. They felt that the understanding of '*semiotics*' in every culture is very crucial, and necessary to draw a complete and a holistic meaning of each culture replete with traditions and observances close to lives of folks. They have extended the study of '*semiotics*' to visuals, films, paintings, fine arts, sculpture, photographs, sounds, music, commentaries, sentences, words, traditions, observances, rituals, etc.

Western foundations to semiotics

It is Ferdinand de Sassure (1857-1913) who laid the foundations for the study of '*Semiotics'* in literature in the West. He described the subject as 'semiology' that deals with signs, symbols and codes in each culture. In US, Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) has described the same branch as '*Semiotics*'. In other words, both '*semiotics*' and '*semiology*' are one and the same. Ferdinand de Sassure is a world-renowned linguist who has a great acquaintance with the Sanskrit and its traditions in India (Srivatasava & Kapoor, 1987, p.217). It was he who had stated with a lot of authority that the Panini's Sanskrit grammar, known as '*Asthadhyaayi*', produced nearly 2,500 years ago, was the mother of all other grammars of languages in the world. Noam Chomsky (1928-till date), a linguist and a multifaceted scholar, has made several references to Panini's '*Ashtadhyayi*' in his famous work—*The Structure of Unscientific Revolutions* (2000). In 1965, Noam Chomsky wrote in the preface to his book—*Aspects of the Theory and Syntax* -- that Panini's grammar (*Ashtadhyayi)* is essentially a generative grammar. Mining Panini's generative grammar, Chomsky has developed transformational-generative grammar in which he discussed about the two levels of structures (surface and deep). Here the emphasis is on the colossal significance of Panini's '*Asthadhyayi*' which has also laid the foundation for '*Semiotics*' in India's ancient Sanskrit literature. Unfortunately, no Sanskrit scholar has ever tried to deal with '*semiotic rules'* that Panini has used as a corpus of literature to delineate meanings in his grammar till the West has come up with its own perceptions of 'signs, symbols and codes' as *'semiotics'* of their own and other cultures.

It must also be born in mind that both de-Sassure's dyadic model of '*semiotics*' and Peirce's triadic model of *'semiotics*' are in practice today and are used to explain various cultures and traditions in different countries. As part of this larger exercise, Edwin Gerow, a linguist and semiotician has written in 1984 an article on – '*Language and Symbol in Indian Semiotics'* which was published in the *Philosophy East and West.* Using Peierce's model of *'semiotics',* he attempted to

analyse whether Pierce's 'semiotic' model stands to explain or interpret Indian '*semiotics*' found in '*Mimamsa*' and '*Nyaya*'. As a result of his study, Gerow found that the behavior of 'signs and symbols' of Indian ancient literature do not behave like the Western signs and symbols fitting into Pierce or Saussure's model.

For instance, in Indian spirituality, '*Prateekopasana*' (worshipping an idol) is very much prevalent. Here '*prateeka*' means an 'idol' –a sign (See Fig.1 Lord Krishna) signifying a particular form of deity. In the normal practice, the '*prateeka*' could be an idol of Lord Vishnu, or Lord Krishna, or Lord Rama, or Lord Kali. The intense one's faith in the idols cited here, the greater the manifestation of God's kindness is. Here, the sign and its signifier both are one and the same. However, if in the place of Lord Krishna's idol, an idol of donkey is placed (See Fig.2 Donkey), will it lead to manifest the presence of God? The answer here is 'yes', strictly a 'yes'. Here the interpretation by Swami Vivekananda[2] (1863-1902) is that 'the immense faith' in the symbol/idol, be it donkey or a monkey, is important not the idol *per se*. What counts here is 'the potential' of faith and devotion, and nothing else. The great the potential, the quicker the manifestation of divinity is. It is independent of '*prateeka*' -- the idol. So, in Indian philosophy, the 'sign' or the 'symbol' does not always connote a signifier or signification. It is the 'faith' outside the triad or dyad that is showing the signification. Such complications in explaining the Indian 'semiotics' in terms of the Western dyadic or triadic models are many.

According to Sandar Hervey (1982), '*semiotics*' is "the conveying of 'messages' by 'signals' constitutes the prototype of the phenomenon of communication". They may happen in the form of alphabets, visuals, art works, paintings, fine arts, etc. Here, the sign 'x' indicates 'y'. The 'y' signifies 'z' Thus, the 'x' is a 'signifier' (y) and 'z' is signified. For instance, there is a road sign as shown below:

Figs: Signs as Signifiers (1.2 & 3)

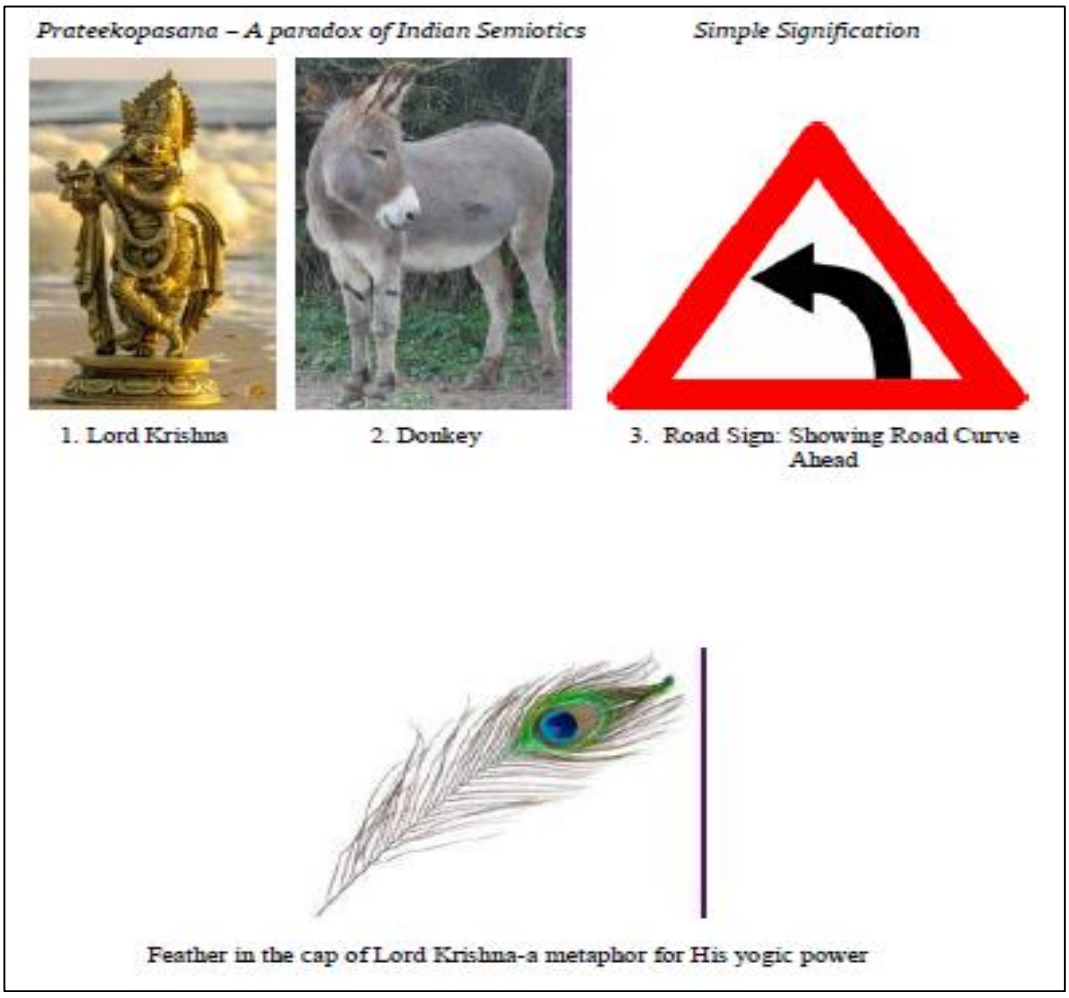

Fig 1: Signs as Signifiers and Paradox

Here the red color triangle (Fig.3) with black curved arrow is a 'sign' (x). What it 'signifies' is to convey to the riders on the road to know that they have to reduce the speed of their vehicles as the 'road ahead is curved'(y). Here the 'meaning of the message' is 'y'. Actual 'curved road' is 'z'. Together both the 'sign' and 'signifier' constitute the 'sign' (x). Such kind of unique expressions, messages and meanings are inherent in all literary, cultural and fine arts traditions ubiquitously. Pierce stated, 'that the entire cognitive world was made up of signs. "The entire world", wrote Peirce, "... is perfused with signs if it is not composed exclusively of signs". He also proposed a doctrine of signs, "... Semiotic (s), a quasinecessary or formal doctrine of signs" (C.S.Peire quoted in Pierre Guiraud, *Semiology*, 1975, p.2).

In fact, in Indian '*advaita*' philosophy, all the three, sign, signified and signifier turn out to be one and remain in the same plane. But, in the mundane world, the three do not or need not remain on the same plane. It means, the 'seer', 'seeing' and the 'seen' –all become one and there is nothing second or external to it. So, '*advaita*' state is also a unified

'sign, signifier and signified. From the foregoing, two issues have become apparent and obvious. Firstly, there is no proper investigation into the 'signs, symbols and codes' that are extant since the times of ancient Vedic literature and culture, though the latter continued into modern age as well in various forms of texts and traditions. Secondly, with the limited research done or available on this ancient literary, cultural and traditional semiotics, it becomes quite clear from the studies of Edwin Gerow (1984) that the behavior of 'signs, symbols and codes' in Indian literature is at variance with the decoding mechanisms of '*semiotics*' enunciated by Charles Sanders Pierce. Against the back drop, the study undertakes how Mellacheruvu Venkata Subrahmanya Sastri, an eminent Sanskrit scholar, explained the *'Semiotics'* in ancient literature through his works.

Mellacheruvu Subrahmanya Sastri: His works in Sanskrit

Mellacheruvu Venkata Subrahmanya Sastri (1948-till today) is an eminent Sanskrit and Telugu scholar who has written more than hundred texts both in Sanskrit and Telugu. He is an unquestionable scholar who produced magnum opus works such as '*Sri Guru Charita*', '*Lalitananda Lahari'*, '*Akarmandanda Lahari'*, '*Charanaravindha Shodasi*,' etc in Sanskrit and Telugu. Chaganti Koteswara Rao [3] (1959-till now; an evangelist, called as *pravachana karta*) and Garikipati Narasimha Rao[4], (1958-till now; a *maha sahasra avadhani* and *pravachanakarta*, an evamgelist), often talk about 'Chandole Rishi/Seer [5]', known as Tadepalli Raghavanarayana Sastri, often refer to the works of Mellachervu Subrahmanya Sastri's work — '*Sri Guru Charita'*. According to Subrahmanya Sastri's Sanskrit *kavya* '*Sri Guru Charita'*, Chandole Rishi/Seer is not only a spiritual giant but also an eminent Sanskrit scholar. Mellacheruvu Subrahmanya Sastri is not only a student of 'Chandole Rishi/ Seer' at his *gurukul* for several long years but also turned out to be a legitimate and the last literary heir to 'Chandole Rishi/Seer'.

Subrahmanya Sastri studied under 'Chandole Rishi' the Vedic literature, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, *Bhagavatam*, *Brahma Sutras* and several other ancient Sanskrit texts for nine long years before he moved to acquire the educational credentials required in accordance with the modern Indian education. He finished his Master's in Sanskrit and Master's in Telugu with first class in both subjects from Andhra University. Later he joined as a lecturer in Tadepalli Raghavanarayana Sastri's Sanskrit College, (which was started in the name of his Guru and an affiliate to Andhra University,Vizag, India), located in Ongole and retired as a lecturer from Gorantla Venkanna Sanskrit College, Timma Samudram, located near Chirala, an assembly constituency.

The spiritual anecdotes that Garikapati Narasimha Rao and Chaganti Koteswara Rao often refer in their speeches, related to the manifestation of *Goddess Bala* (one of the nine faces of Goddess Durga) to Tadepalli Raghava Narayana Sastri, events like Kanchi Seer Chandrasekhara Swamy [6] (the late head pontiff-called as *Pithaadhipati*) visiting the Tadepalli Raghavanarayana Sastri at his native town, Chandole, and the close association between Chandole Rishi/Seer with Kanchi Seer till they lasted, etc were taken from the magnum opus Sanskrit Kavya '*Sri Guru Charita*' written by Mellacheruvu Subrahmanya Sastri's work. Subrahamanya Sastri, in the later years, has produced a mini-novel on his teacher/spiritual guru 'Chandole Rishi/Seer' a Telugu version of '*Sri Guru Charita'*, known as '*Pitaputra Kaveeswarulu-Chandole Maharshulu*'.

Most of the works of Subrahmanya Sastri are in Sanskrit, albeit their being in Telugu script. Some are written in Telugu as well. Subrahmanya Sastri in fact writes in Sanskrit too. He has written a commentary in Sanskrit with *nagara lipi* on '*Siddhanta Sindhuhu'* of Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi [7] on the requisition from Rashtriya Sanskrit Vidya Peetham, (a deemed University), Tirupathi. Almost all of his works could be called as *Kavyas*. He has also written commentaries with – *Tika* and *Taatparya* (*Tika* means word wise meaning (includes *pada vibhajana* and *vibhaaga*, *sandhi*, *samasa*, etc), *Taatparya* means giving the substance of the entire poem). The *kavyas* are written in Sanskrit/Telugu verse form with prosodic[8] traditions of Sanskrit and Telugu. His ability to translate and offer commentaries to the works of Bellamkonda Ramarayakavi, who is also known as *Apara Adi Shankara* and *Hayagreeva Avatara*, stands as a touch stone for his excellence in philosophical and ancient spiritual texts (Murthy, 2019).

At the same time, he has rendered into Telugu the classical texts relating to medieval Sanskrit literary traditions. He has rendered into Telugu the classical text of Vidyaranyamuni[9] as –*Andhra Vivarana Prameyam*. Almost every Sanskrit scholar knows the complex traditions followed by Vidyaranyamuni in his works. Similarly, Sarvagnyaatmamuni's original commentary was rendered into Telugu by Madhusudhan Saraswathi [10] but the language was very tough for any ordinary reader to understand. Subrahmanya Sastri has further simplified it in Telugu and supplemented it with his own commentary wherever required. He named the work as – '*Andhra Samkshepa Saareerakam*'. His translations and commentaries to Bellamkonda Ramarayakavi's works include – *Paramaatma Sahasranamaavali*, *Siddhanta Simdhuhu*, *Ramavallabharaya Satakam* (Sanskrit commentary), *Advaita Vijayam*, *Vedanta Nischayam*, *Advaitaamritam*, *Bhagavata Chatussloki*, *Siddhanta Sidhuhu* (*Dasasloki* commentary), *Sankarasankara Bhaashya Vimarsa*, etc have earned him an honor of rare excellence in Sanskrit and Telugu (Murthy, 2019).

Sastri's works

Mellacheruvu Subrahmanya Sastri's *kavyas* in Telugu are about 15-20. They include both mini and big *kavyas*. *Sami Saranam*, *Madalasa Jolapata*, *Atma Suprabhatam*, *Astidevam* (*Sadasatsamsayam*), *Kanakadhara Stavam* (translation of poems together with *tika-taatparyam*), *Sri Krishna Raasalila-Yogatrayee Hela*, *Beeja Tantram*, *Chandole-Maharshulu*, *Atukulalo Kitukulu* (a critique), *Gajendra Moksham*, *Rishi Runam*, *Vaamanudu-Vaamanam*, etc. In addition to these literary works, his commentaries are about 15-20. *Tripura Mahimna Strotram*, *Ramakrishna Viloma Kavyam*, *Brahmasutra Bhashya Kara Dipika*, *Kanakadhaara Stavam*, *Vignyana Bhairavam*, *Vishnu Sahasranama Strotram*, *Siva Gita*, *Vaagdevi Stuti*, *Muktidwara Stavarajaha*, *Varaho Upanishattu*, etc. Among these, *Siddhanta Sindhuhu* (Telugu lipi-Sanskrit source-*Dasa Sloki Vyaakhya*) was written in collaboration with Ravi Mohana Rao [11]. Another text of *Siddhanta Sindhuhu* (Nagar lipi) was written exclusively by Subrahmanya Sastri on the requisition from *Rashtriya Vidyapeetham*, Tirupathi.

Sastri's pathway in decoding the semiotics in ancient literature

Sastri is the first Sanskrit scholar who produced an authoritative version of the biography of Tadepalli Raghavanarayana Sastri, (Chandole Seer), entitled '*Sri Guru*

Charita'. In his work, Sastri not only explained how he has adopted his 'Guru's style of decoding *semiotics* but also narrated the works that have helped him to develop a technique of unfolding the meanings embedded in the semiotics he has used. Firstly, he has studied the poetic works of Guntur Seshendra Sarma [12]'s '*Shodasi Ramayana-Rahasyamulu* (*Shodasi* Ramayana—It's Secrets) and '*Swarna Hamsa'* (Golden Swan). In '*Swarna Hamsa'*, Sri Harsha [13] followed the technique of his Guru in unplugging the '*semiotics knots'*. It was Seshendra Sarma who was first to bring the secrets out embedded in the form of '*semiotic knots*.

In fact, Velcheru Narayana Rao in his work '*Text and Tradition in South India'* (2017) has documented that Vavilikolanu Subbarao [14] is the first scholar-poet who translated the Valmiki Ramayana in a word-to-word translation method into Telugu. His translation was entitled '*Mandarm*'. According to Vavilikolanu Subba Rao, the seer Valmiki has embedded a lot of spiritual power in each of the *slokas* in his Ramayana. Vavilikolanu Subba Rao has stated that in his '*Mandaram*', he has hidden all that spiritual power in his translation as well. Therefore, the *slokas* in Valmiki's Sanskrit Ramayana and Vavilikolanu Subba Rao's Telugu Ramayana are not just Sanskrit verses but are '*mantras*.

Similarly, Ekkirala Krishnamacharyulu[15] has written '*Bhagavata Rahasya Prakasam'* in which he has explained a number of spiritual secrets embedded in the Vyasa's *Bhagavatam Slokas*. A critical study of all these above works, claimed Mellacheruvu Subrahmanya Sastri, has taken his ability to decode the '*Semiotics*' and 'semiotic knots' embedded in the Indian spiritual literature to the next heights.

Now let us see how Sastri has achieved the decoding of 'semiotics' in the spiritual texts of ancient spiritual literature by taking a couple of the texts he has produced: *Sri Nirajana* (*Sri Tripura Mahimna Stotram*), and *Sri Krishna Raasa Leela—Yogatrayee Hela*.

Sree Nirajana (Andhra Vyakhya)

This is a commentary on the original work '*Sri Tripura Mahimna Stotram'* of Seer Durvasa. Sastri has described the '*semiotics*' in the work of '*Sri Tripura Mahimna Stotram'* as *Sanketa Sastram* as he is unaware of the existence of '*semiotics*' (*Sangnya Sastram*) as a specialized sociological, literary and linguistic communication branch in the West. In the words of Subrahmanya Sastri, '*sanketa sastram'* means – communication expressed as 'signs. In short, he meant that 'entire language system is nothing but 'signs', and without 'signs' language and culture does not exist'. A 'sign', explains Sastri, signifies an 'object' and 'sign' in literary context could be a 'word' or a 'sound' or an 'alphabet' as well. He adds that if there is no such relationship, then it is difficult to infer any meaning between a 'word' (or an 'alphabet') and its 'sound'. Therefore, *'sanket sastram'* 'means' assigning a meaning to 'alphabets' in a given '*mantra*'. Each 'alphabet' in a given *'mantra'* has a specific meaning or multiple meanings. In other words, Sastri argues that 'alphabets' embed the meaning in a given '*mantra*'.

For instance, the Telugu alphabet '*ka*' means light, or desire (*prakaasam, vaamcha*), etc. Does an 'alphabet' derive 'so much' or 'so many' meanings? Subrahmanya Sastri's instantaneous response is – 'yes', an 'alphabet' offers it indeed. He cites '*ekaakshara nighantuvu*' as an incontrovertible evidence to buttress his interpretations. According to '*ekaakshara nighantuvu*, each 'alphabet' can offer single to many meanings. Based on the above interpretations, he has begun to interpret 'Tripura Mahimna Stotram' written by Durvasa Seer as a separate text entitled 'Sri Nirajana' (Andhra Vyaakhya means Telugu Commentary).

As part of this larger exercise, Sastri has first described the morphological semantics of 'mantras. It is very essential for the understanding of '*Semiotics*' in spiritual literature. It is this part of secrets of spiritual literature that remained obscure to many Western Sanskrit scholars which was why they failed to draw proper meaning embedded in 'semiotics' of ancient Indian spiritual literature. Sastri divided the 'mantras' into two parts: *Ved mantras* and *Beej mantras*. He has assorted the *Beej mantras* again into two: *Beej mantras, Vaakya mantras*. All *beej mantras* are '*semiotical*' in communicating the 'meanings' embedded therein. These *beej mantras* are created to describe the spiritual power of a targeted object--'God'/'Goddess'. The spiritual power is embedded in the '*beej*' (which is nothing but alphabets). It means that both the 'object' as well as its 'power' is embedded in the 'sign' which is nothing but an 'alphabet'.

It means the '*mantra*' is the body of the targeted object--God/Goddess. Due to lack of this kind of understanding, Western scholars like Gerow (1984) could not gain proper comprehension on the behavior of 'signs', 'symbols' and 'codes' in ancient Indian spiritual literature such as '*Mimamsa*' and '*Nyaya*'. This part of Sastri's description of so called '*samketa sastram'*, as put forward by Sastri himself, which we are calling now as per western standards as '*semiotics*,' could be considered as 'codification' of semiotic conventions in ancient Vedic literature. Simply put otherwise, '*mantra*' itself is 'the God/Goddess'. By uttering repeatedly, the '*beej*' in the mantras one is invoking a particular form (appearance) of a targeted 'God/Goddess'. When '*Dhyanam*'(repeated utterance of the *'beej'*), '*Dhyata* (the person who utters *beej* repeatedly), and '*Dhyeyam*' (the targeted Goddess) merge into one plane, the form of the targeted God appears before, and again dissolves in the '*beej*' of the '*mantra*' after fulfilling the aspirations of the 'Dhyata'. Thus, here the '*beej*' is not only an 'alphabet' but also is a 'sign'. It is a 'signifier' as it 'signified' the targeted form of the God/Goddess. There is another way of understanding the semiotics in Indian Vedic literature when it comes to 'words', not alphabets. For instance, the utterance of the phrase, '*Indraaya Swaahaa'* means 'the invocation of the form of Indra'. Here, '*swaahaa*' does not mean 'any offering to *Indra*' as many tend to imply from the word '*swaahaa*'.

Mellacheruvu Subrahmanya Sastri offers the following *sloka* as evidence from the study of '*Sri Vidya Deepika'*.

> Jnyapakam devataa deenam yadbheejamakshara muchyate
> Mantraanaam chinaat Devi samanuhu devataaswayam
> Dhyanenaa darsanam datvaa punarmantreshu leeyate

It means '*Sri Vidya Deepika'* (the essence of signs to understand the signification of God/Goddess) is embedded in 'signs' that offer both 'meaning' and 'form'. This is also called '*maaya sakti'*. Actually, the power of the God/Goddess is to create 'illusion' about the 'creation' which tacitly implies the inability of an individual to see 'the spirit as distinct from the body'. It signifies the 'creation' (*Srishti*) that is what apparent and physical, besides being 'real'. But, in the given 'signs' embedded in the form of '*beej*' offer an opportunity to visualize of the targeted God/Goddess as an extraneous 'form' (the real form) to this 'illusion' (virtual) and enable the individual to actually visualize the 'spirit' as distinct from the 'body'. All these 'signs' that direct an individual to visualize

the 'real form' of the targeted object together are called '*Sri Chakra'* – a structure of multiple triangles placed one over the other in a stack that offers a shape of a pyramid with wide bottom below and a sharp tip at the top.

In other words, Sastri describes the 'form' of the targeted God/Goddess is full of '*semiotics*'. He cites a *mantra* that explains it as follows: *chakra samketako mantra puja samketa Kamati, trividham tripuraadyevaha samketaha parameswari*. It means a 'triad of signs' is the form of the targeted God/Goddess. This explains how during the Vedic times itself, the 'sign, signifier, and signified' had been perceived.

The foregoing thus offers a substantial evidence from the critical reading of '*Sri Tripura Mahimna Stotram'* that 'signs, symbols and codes', besides 'sign, signifier and signified,' existed in the Indian ancient spiritual literature nearly 5000 years ago as opposed to the latest '*semiotics*' established in the post half of the nineteenth century. Based on the above theoretical assumptions, Subrahmanya Sastri tried to explain the triadic *'semiotic structure'* and '*form*' of the targeted God/Goddess with the help of *'beej mantra'* also known as '*Panchadasi*' or '*shodasi*'.

Table 1. Alphabet Signs, signifiers, signification and etymology in Vedic Literature

Mantra: ka e ee la hreem –Total Five letters

Meaning of alphabet sign	Meaning	Etymology
ka	Prakash (Light/brightness)	*Kan dhatu* (root word/verb)
e	*Smaranam* (repeated utterance)	*In, ing dhatu*
ee	*Vyaapti* (Diffuse/spread)	*Ee dhatu*
lahri	*Pravahaha* (Flow, excessiveness)	*Lahri* dhatu (indirect form)
m	Bodhimchatam/Sabdimchatam (Inform/sounding)	*Maa* dhatu

- Source: *Vaagbhava Khanda of Sri Vidya Deepika (Written by Seer Agasthya)*

Legend: Table 1. Substance: The significations of all alphabets combinedly mean that – inculcates and promotes illuminating intellect diffusions /or imparts critical understanding of *Shiv/Sakti tatvam.*

Table 2. Alphabet Signs, signifiers, signification and etymology in Vedic Literature

Mantra: ha sa la ja la hreem –Total Six letters

Meaning of alphabet sign	Meaning	Etymology
ha	*Himsa /nivarana* (lost/cause violence)	*Han dhatu* (root word/verb)
sa	*Samaptia(the end)*	*Show dhatu*
ka	*Kaama, Vamcha (desires)*	*Haaj dhatu*
lahri	*Pravahaha* (Flow, excessiveness)	*Lahri* dhatu (indirect form)
ee	*Pravahaha* (Flow, excessiveness	*Ee dhatu*
m	*Bodhana/Sabdam* (Inform/sounding)	*Maa dhatu*

- Source: *Vaagbhava Khanda of Sri Vidya Deepika (Written by Seer Agasthya)*

Legend: Table 2. Ends those cause violence and bestow affluence, luxury and pleasure like an incessant flow from *Shiv/Sakti.*

Table 3. Alphabet Signs, signifiers, signification and etymology in Vedic Literature

Mantra: sa ka la hreem –Total four letters

Meaning of alphabet sign	Meaning	Etymology
sa	*Samaptia(the end)*	*Show dhatu*
ka	*Kaama, Vamcha (desires)*	*Haqj dhatu*
la	*Pravahaha* (Flow, excessiveness)	*Lahri* dhatu (indirect form)
hree	*harayati* (annihilate)	*Hrij dhatu*
m	*Bodhana/Sabdam* (Inform/sounding)	*Maa* dhatu

- Source: *Vaagbhava Khanda of Sri Vidya Deepika (Written by Seer Agasthya)*

Legend: Table 3. The power of *Naada sakti* (sound sakti) ends all the creation, brings closeness with '*atma*', the eternal, the infinite. By calling an end of 'creation' implies 'beginning of creation.'

First, he explained the '*beej mantra*' – *panchadasi* which is constituted of 15 alphabets. If alphabet '*Eem*' or '*Sreem*' is added to these 15 alphabets (*panchadasi*), then it would be called as '*shodasi*'. Sastri has utilized the work of Agasthya seer '*Sri Vidya Deepika'* to explain the meaning of '*shodasi/panchadasi'* which is fully semiotic. He has adopted an ingenious method of interpreting the work of Durvasa seer's '*Sri Tripura Mahimna Stotram'*. There are approximately 30-32 *avataarikas* in this monumental work. He chose to explain each *sloka*/*mantra* giving – word wise split meaning, and substance first according to the targeted God/Goddess, second by word wise split meaning and substance as per the *beej mantra*, followed by semiotic interpretations—signs, signifiers and significations together with codes and conventions wherever they were followed. Here Subrahmanya Sastri had adopted a unique pathway of deciphering semiotics. Whatever the word-wise split meanings, substances and semiotic interpretations he had given to the *mantras*/*slokas* in *Sri Triprura Mahimna Stotram*, they were supported from the other *mantras/slokas* (eg. *Gayatri mantra*) based on '*ekaakshara nighantuvu'*. Thus, he has demonstrated the adoption of same 'semiotics' for explaining the other mantras which resulted in achieving a unity of interpreting mechanism for all the mantras/slokas basic to Indian ancient Vedic literature. In doing such comparative study of semiotics with other mantras as well, he demonstrated his unquestionable authority on 'semiotics' or on what he described as 'sanketa sastra'.

Sri Krishna Raasaleela-Yogatrayee Hela

This is an exclusive magnum opus work of Mellacheruvu Subrahmanya Sastri written in Telugu script. In this Sastri explained the '*Raasa Lila*' of Lord Sri Krishna in *Bhagavatam*, originally written by seer Vyasa, in terms of '*semiotics*' or what Sastri termed as '*Sanketa Sastra*'. The work is a culmination of a series of lectures that Sastri has delivered three decades ago under the title '*Raasa Lila-Intrinsic Meaning'*. Sastri has used the '*pincham*' as emblematic to explain the entire meaning of '*Raasa Lila'* and divided his work into 12 chapters. The '*pincham*' has become 'metaphor' here in terms of Western '*Semiotics'*. He interpreted the meaning of '*Raasa Lila'* of *Bhagavatam* in each of the twelve chapters from a particular and different angle. No angle in any of the 12 chapters bears any semblance with any of the contents or interpretation in another chapter. That is the ingenuity of this work. There are so many commentaries that tended to misinterpret the '*Raasa Lila'* from its intended meaning originally meant by seer Vyasa. In order to correct such misinterpretations, Sastri has chosen '*Semiotics*', which he referred to in his work as '*sanketa saastra'*. In the process, he has chosen to offer right interpretations to '*Raasa Lila*' availing signs/symbols of semiotics for 'sounds' and 'meanings.

He has brought out the secret 'sounds' and 'meanings' embedded in the '*Raasa Lila*' of *Bhagavatam* in a series of genres: knowledge-wise, time-wise, inter-stellar wise, yoga-wise, Vedas-wise, body-wise, *mantras*-wise, *mumuksha*'s-wise (a *mumuksha* is one who desires for liberation from the cycle of births and deaths). In order to explain these facets of '*Raasa Lila'*, Sastri used '*Semiotics*' which he already explained in his work- '*Sri Tripura Mahimna Stotram'*. For instance, in the 11th chapter of the present work on '*Raasa Lila'*, he explains how semiotically the sound '*hree*' as '*ekaakshara*' could be interpreted to understand its ultimate 'signification' in '*Gopakanyaa Vastraaphaharanam'*. '*Hreeschate lakshmischa patnaiy*' is a popular mantra in '*Purusha Suktam'*, a Vedic hymn/chant describing the '*akhanda tatva'* (infiniteness and incessantness) of Almighty. Here, '*hree*' sound acts as a 'sign' signifying 'an enclosure of space' *(aavarana*). It represents and implies an external body enclosing the '*atman*' (soul) embedded inside it. In other words, '*hree*' signifies '*lajja*' (shame) which philosophically or spiritually relates to 'body' the external '*aavarana'* (enclosure) of 'atman'. *'Hree'* is thus signifying the body

concept of man and woman among humans which is an illusory difference caused by '*maaya sakti'* that hides the common spirit the '*atman*' that is prevalent among all creatures in the universe.

Humans tend to cover their bodies with cloths (enclosures) in order to avoid 'shame and embarrassment' to each other gender. In *Mahabharat,* a reader encounters an incident where the '*yaksha*' (One of the demi-gods) demands from Pandavas an explanation to '*hree'* sound. Here the question is raised about what '*hree*' means in interpreting – '*hreekaara nivartanam'*. In the given context of 'yaksha's question, '*hree*' means the untoward act or acts which humans feel shame to perform. '*Hree*' also implies/signifies 'that which can be killed or demolished. '*Hree*' sound has originated from the *dhatu* --'*hee*'. Its signification lies in the 'separation of *atman* from *paramatman*' (Almighty). It spiritually connotes 'the illusory cognition' caused by the '*maaya sakti'*. The *gopikas* (the women of cowherds) have suffered distance from Lord Krishna due to the feeling that arose from '*hree*' that is caused by body consciousness which also signifies the male and female difference, bringing a 'feel of shame' to their conscience. As Lord Krishna destroyed the consciousness of '*hree*' from their psyche, they ultimately merged their '*atmans*' with *'paramatman'* (Lord Krishna Himself).

By illustrating the 'signs' through '*ekakshara nighantuvu'*, Sastri used a technique of tracing various connotations of the root word/*dhatu* of sign '*hree*' and ultimately explained how the destruction of '*hree*' among humans by Lord Krishna has led to unification of 'souls' with 'ultimate soul'. Thus, it is an accepted process to use connotations, denotations, metaphors, similies, hyperboles, etc in interpreting the 'signs' in the Vedic texts, and the texts arising from these such as *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and *Bhagavatam*. Similarly, in the 10th chapter, - *gopikas* and their *kaamaas* (desires)—Sastri draws similarities to the sound of the word – *Chikleet*, one of the three heads of desires along with two other heads of desires, *Madan* and *Daman*—has relationship with the sound of the word- '*chikleta*' in *Sree Suktam* (it is a Vedic hymn/chant that describes the power of the *Virat purush* as a 'feminine in form') as well as the sound of the word– '*kleem*' — in *Shodasi*.

Thus, Subrahmanya Sastri has placed before us two Vedic texts—*Sri Nirajana* (a commentary on *Sri Tripura Mahimna Stotram*) and *Sri Krishna Raasa Lila- Yogatraiyee Hela* in which he has offered new pathways to decipher the meanings of '*Semiotics*' in ancient spiritual literature. Today, India lacks in number of Sanskrit scholars who have an unflinching passion for rediscovering the *'semiotics'* that was founded in the ancient Indian Vedic texts about 5000 years ago. Those literary traditions speaking through *'semiotics'*, albeit continued for long afterwards in the later texts like *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata, and Bhagavatam*, besides other texts like *Nyaya, Vaiseshika, Mimamsa*, etc, no major effort has ever forth come till Mellacheruvu Subrahmanya Sastri has placed before these texts for us.

The early colonial scholars trained in the Western social and scientific theories have focused more or relating every Indian phenomenon to Western theories. Had they turned to Indian ancient literature for many of the equivalents to the Western theories during or after colonial times, probably there would not have been a need for Edward Said to produce a magnum opus work like '*Orientalism*'.

End Notes

1. Bhadriraju Krishna Murti (1928-2012). An eminent Dravidian linguist, the second scholar selected for Stanford University's Think Tank (School of Behavioural Sciences) and an elected member of American Society of Linguists. He was instrumental in getting the Telugu language the ancient literature status along with Tamil and Kannada.
2. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902): An eminent spiritualist of *advaita Vedanta*, the foremost disciple of Sri Ramkarishna of Kolkata, and a monk who established the famous Sri Ramakrishna Mission in India and abroad. He came into limelight of the world after speaking at the Chicago Parliament of Religions on Sept 11, 1893 on the supremacy of India as a 'beckon of knowledge and wisdom'. The world media hailed his speech and described him as an 'orator by divine order'.
3. Chaganti Koteswara Rao (1959-till now). An eminent scholar both in Sanskrit and Telugu, Hindu religious preacher, an evangelist, called as *pravachana karta* in Sanskrit.
4. Garikipati Narasimha Rao (1958-till now) an eminent scholar both in Sanskrit and Telugu, a maha *sahasra avadhani* and *pravachanakarta*, an evangelist. An Avadhani means one who delivers a series of poems in Telugu extempore taking cues/questions from 8 (Ashta) to 1000 (Sahasra) eminent scholars in the same language.
5. Chandole Rishi/Seer (1896-1990). Chandole Seer is an epithet to Tadepalli Raghava Narayana Sastri, son of Tadepalli Venktappaiah Sastri, who lived for life time at Chandole, a small village located on the state highway from Guntur to Repalle. Both father and son together are referred to as Rishis who performed penance intensely for attaining the darsan of 'Sakti' and ultimately attained it. Both the father and son are eminent Sanskrit and Telugu scholars, versatile in Sanskrit poetry and commentary. The head pontiff of Kanchi *math* Chandrasekhara Swamy had personally visited the seer's home at Chandole endorsing the highest spiritual attainments of both the father and son. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chandole
6. Kanchi Seer Chandrasekhara Swamy (the late head pontiff-called as *Pithaadhipati*) (1894- 1994). A highly elevated spiritual soul, who always remained in a state of *advaita, yet* performing his mundane duties as any normal individual. He is known for his omniscience and scholarship in various subjects including the evolution of languages such as philology, morphology, semantics.
7. He has travelled entire India on foot and spread the messages of Dharma for nearly 100 years. He is often called as –walking God.
8. Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi (1875-1914). was an Indian poet, author, yogi, Sanskrit scholar and a philosopher. Sanskrit scholars view Ramaraya Kavi as a strong proponent of *Advaita siddhanta* (theory) of Adi Shankara. His philosophical interpretations and dialectics of logical disputation of *Advaita* system of thought earned him the name *Apara Adi Shankara* which means—Ramaraya Kavi is another incarnation of Adi Shankara. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bellamkonda_Ramaraya_Kavindrulu
9. Prosody. It is a study of all the elements of language that contribute toward acoustic and rhythmic effects, chiefly

in poetry but also in prose. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prosody_(linguistics)

10. Vidyaranyamuni (1268-1391). Vidyaranya is variously known as a kingmaker, patron saint and high priest to Harihara I and Bukka Raya I, the founders of the Vijayanagara Empire. He was the 12th Jagadguru of the *Śringeri Śarada Pītham* from 1380-1386. Vidyaranya helped the brothers establish the empire sometime in 1336.
11. Madhusudhan Saraswathi (1540-1640). Madhusūdana Sarasvatī is an Indian saint philosopher and a Sanskrit scholar-cum-author in *Advaita Vedānta*.
12. Ravi Mohana Rao. He is a Sanskrit lecturer, scholar and a co-author with Mellacheruvu Subrahmanya Sastri. Both of them have done a couple of works on the poetry of Bellamkonda Ramaraya Kavi. He is a philanthropist and funded the publication of many works of Subrahmanya Sastri and others.
13. Guntur Seshendra Sarma (1927-2007). He is an eminent Sanskrit/ Telugu poet, critic and litterateur. His works on *Shodasi-Ramayana Rahasyamulu* (*Shodasi Ramayana* Secrets) and *Swarna Hamsa* are well known for their excellence in unfolding and decoding the tantric secrets of semiotics in the works of *Ramayana* and Sri Harsha's poetry-- *Naishadhiya Charita*.
14. Sri Harsha. An eminent Sanskrit poet of 12th century. His work Naishadhiya Charita is famous for its '*semiotic knots'*. It offered immense secrets of decoding 'semiotics' in ancient Indian spiritual literature.
15. Vavilikolanu Subbarao (1863-1939). An eminent Telugu and Sanskrit scholar, who rendered word to word true Telugu translation of Valmiki *Ramayana*. His Telugu translation of Ramayana is entitled-*Mandaram*. It contained all the spiritual secrets embedded in Sanskrit Ramayana in Telugu as well.
16. Ekkirala Krishnamacharyulu (1926-1984). Is a spiritual giant, yoga teacher and an eminent Sanskrit scholar. He authored several works in Sanskrit and Telugu. One of his famous works Bhgavatra Rahasya Prakasam is well known for its laying foundations for deciphering semiotics in ancient texts.

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